

Freedom to... *Speak!*

Volume 6, Issue 1

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Journalists for Human Rights at McGill



Journalists for Human Rights at McGill, a club at SSMU since 2003, is one chapter of a growing Canadian NGO currently working in thirteen African countries. The primary mandate of the head organization is to build the capacity of the African media to report effectively on human rights issues.

Our JHR chapter works to increase the visibility of human rights abuses within the community, the country and throughout the world. We publish Speak! Newspaper twice a semester, and in 2007-8 launched Speak! Radio on CKUT 90.3FM. We organize speaker events and movie screenings, and participate in local and Canada-wide fundraisers. In January 2009, we held our first “epic party”, Rights in Black and White, at Club 737; this will become an annual event! In March 2009, we held our first Train the Trainers Conference on Media and Human Rights open to all McGill students. Given the overwhelming interest in this event, we intend to hold it again in September 2009.

Beyond providing an outlet for students to discuss and publish articles and broadcast stories on important human rights issues, our JHR chapter also works to provide a voice for all other human rights related groups at McGill. Our publications report on the issues other clubs are covering and publicize the events they are organizing. So far we have collaborated with Amnesty McGill, the McGill Global AIDS Coalition, CKUT, the Baha’i Association, McGill University Law School’s Human Rights Working Group, and the North Korea Freedom Network, and we are a member of the Campus Coalition of Progressive McGill Organizations.

JHR McGill also provides students with national and international human rights journalism opportunities. Through the JHR Chapters Program, we have offered McGill students opportunities for publication in national publications (magazines and academic journals) and to participate in internships in Ghana. You can check out the most recent opportunities at <http://jhrmcgill.wordpress.com/opportunities>.

JHR McGill is always open to new members, so if you would like to write and edit articles for Speak!, assist with the radio broadcast, or help fundraise and organize events, send us an email and we will add you to our listserv at jhrmcgill@gmail.com

To learn more about JHR, the NGO, please visit: <http://www.jhr.ca>

For more info about JHR McGill and our upcoming activities: <http://jhrmcgill.wordpress.com>

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From the Speak! Editor-in-Chief

A new year has begun, and with it a new issue of Speak! The Free Speech theme tackles issues of press freedom around the world and what is being done to ensure the safety and freedom of journalists reporting on contentious issues. The writers, editors and layout team have done an amazing job putting this issue together, and I am very excited to see more of their work this year.

Manisha Aggarwal-Schifellite

VP Newspaper and Speak! Editor-in-Chief

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PROTEST 2.0

By: Abby Plener

"Peaceful protesters are my write-in candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize. You are not forgotten!"

"We need a Gov that doesn't torture, imprison, endanger & kill its citizen just because they are protesting."

These are some of the posts on the IranElection Twitter page. The social networking site has become an intense hub of activity for protesters and dissidents. Users have been sharing photos and stories from violent protests in Iran, capturing images of government officials beating protestors, as well as alerting others about future scheduled protests through their Twitter pages. Twitter co-executive Biz Stone noted the number of new accounts being created in the midst of the election riots, signalling the recognition of Twitter as an important form of communication for Iranian dissidents. The Tehran Bureau, an independent Iranian news source who claims to be "The Leaders of Iran's Election Coup", posts news updates and commentary through their Facebook group page and allows group members to post their own thoughts.

In the wake of widespread protests against Iran's contested June elections, Iranian authorities cracked down on communication tools that facilitate opposition organization. Text messaging services were shut down, while cell phone transmissions, as well as access to Facebook to other sites were blocked.

But the internet crackdown has proven to be more difficult than authorities anticipated. Not only have protesters managed to access to the internet, but social networking sites have evolved into a powerful force behind the opposition movement.

Twitter is a particularly difficult tool to censor because users can create posts through many different sources, including phones, web browsers, and other specialized applications. Citizens outside Iran have set up proxy IPs to confuse Iranian servers, and have provided tips through Twitter and Facebook pages for those inside Iran to set up their own servers and prevent these sites by being infiltrated by Iranian censors.

One of those citizens is Austin Heap, a San Franciscan information technology consultant whose private proxies provide Internet connections for about 750 Iranians at a time. His involvement is motivated by his belief: "Cyber activism can be a way to empower people living under less than democratic governments around the world". Austin advertises these proxies and other tips through his blog on www.AustinHeap.com, and his Twitter account.

Twitter executives had planned to shut down the site for 90 minutes on June 15th for maintenance purposes, but their plans were halted by the U.S. State department who requested that the site remain available for use since it had become such an important communication tool for dissidents. To quote one Iranian Twitter user, "When I'm not connected to Twitter it means that I'm disconnected from the world because the state TV doesn't report many things!"

Twitter has become a professional tool for bloggers and journalists in Iran, allowing them to report immediately on unfolding events, while reaching a global audience. Media outlets such as the Associate Press have begun to monitor Twitter and other websites for news tips.

NYU Professor Clay Shirky explained, "This is the first revolution that has been catapulted onto a global stage and transformed by social media. I've been thinking a lot about the Chicago demonstrations of 1968 where they chanted 'the whole world is watching'. Really, that wasn't true then. But this time it's true.." Citizens around the world are educating themselves, engaging each other in discussions, organizing action, and spreading awareness about the Iran election - and it's all happening in cyberspace through social networking tools. This level of global participation would have been impossible in any other age. This is protesting 2.0.

Social networking is also more personal than conventional media tools, inviting citizens to connect and express solidarity with one another.

Enough writing. Time to post this article on Twitter. §

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NO GOLD MEDALS FOR FREE SPEECH

Vancouver's Olympic bylaw provokes Charter challenge from Vancouver activists

By: Juliana Dailey

In early October, two anti-Olympic activists announced that they will challenge the constitutionality of the City of Vancouver's Olympic bylaw package on the grounds that it violates their Charter-protected rights to freedom of expression. They argue that the bylaw, which Vancouver passed over the summer to facilitate the Winter Games, will effectively ban several forms of public protest.

The BC Civil Liberties Association, which is supporting the court challenge, has called the Olympic bylaw an affront to free speech.

"Its purpose and effect is to limit citizens' rights to express dissenting views and to hear dissenting views on public property," said David Eby, executive director of the BCCLA, in a news release announcing the court challenge.

The bylaw bans the distribution of advertizing material or leaflets, the use of megaphones, the display of any signs without a city permit, and even noise which interferes with the enjoyment of an Olympic event. However, only signs which do not create or enhance the "festive environment and atmosphere" of the 2010 Winter Games are subject to the sign regulation. The bylaw will also create an unspecified number of police-facilitated protest spaces or "free speech zones" outside Olympic sites.

The activists challenging the bylaw, Chris Shaw, author of *Five-Ring Circus: the True Cost of the Olympic Games* and Alissa Westergard-Thorpe, law student and Olympic Resistance Network member, say they will

engage in activities which are currently prohibited by the Olympic bylaws. They plan to sell anti-Olympic buttons and T-shirts, distribute leaflets and use signs to protest the Games.

"I want to be able to express my dissent," Chris Shaw said in a comment to the CBC, "I do intend to hand out leaflets. I may stand there with a protest banner. I may want to engage tourists in conversations. I want to be able to do all those things that I am guaranteed under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

The announcement of the lawsuit has come after months of mounting concern from activists, civil liberties advocates and members of the general public about freedom of expression during the 2010 Olympics. The BCCLA and Pivot Legal Society, a Vancouver-based centre for legal advocacy, have trained about 100 legal observers to monitor the conduct police and city staff for rights violations during the Olympics.

Vancouver has defended its position on civil liberties during the Olympic Games. After a provision allowing VANOC, the body organizing the Vancouver Olympics, or city staff to remove unlicensed posters from city property was deleted, council members were generally supportive of the new bylaw.

"I don't see any lingering hurdles to freedom of speech and other freedoms that we expect in our society lurking in the background of this bylaw," said city councilor Suzanne Anton, in a comment to the Vancouver Sun.

In response to mounting concern, VANOC issued a statement last month claiming that that it had achieved a "reasonable balance of interests" between freedom of



Anti-Olympic protest parade in downtown Vancouver.

expression, the celebration of sport and the protection corporate interests.

Authorities also insisted that the creation of the optional protest spaces will enhance, rather than hinder free speech, promising that the spaces will be “high-profile” and will be guided by the principles of “safety, proximity, and visibility”. It has also been confirmed that the areas will not be fenced, although VANOC’s police force, the Integrated Security Unit, will facilitate the use of the spaces.

However, many remain skeptical of VANOC’s plans. Documents obtained by the BCCLA through Freedom of Information Act requests reveal what it is calling an IOC agenda to interfere with Canadian rights to free speech.

“Individually, the documents are offensive but could be seen as an overzealous mistake,” said BCCLA president Robert Holmes in a press release, “When assembled, however, they paint a dire picture of an international organization that feels Canadian rights and freedoms are secondary to their motive of profit from the Olympic franchise.”

All host cities are bound by the IOC’s Olympic Charter, which forbids “political, religious or racial” propaganda

inside the venues. However, critics have pointed out that Vancouver’s contracts regulate free speech more extensively than past Olympic contracts. Vancouver’s bylaw extends to all major access points leading to Olympic venues, which includes major roadways, the public library and a downtown park. The documents obtained by the BCCLA revealed that VANOC has even asked other municipalities along the Olympic torch route to pass bylaws ensuring that no political messages be distributed or visible.

According to columnist Daphne Bramham, these limitations can be seen as part of a trend towards the tightening of IOC control over its host cities to protect the corporate interests at stake in the Olympics. Vancouver’s contract puts the interests of the IOC first, by requiring the city to carry out the Games “in a manner which promotes and enhances the integrity, ideals and long-term interests of the IOC and the Olympic Movement.” She points out that the expanded regulations reflected in Vancouver’s bylaw were required by its IOC contract.

“From no-fly zones to free-speech areas,” she observes, “Olympic officials want to control what the world can see.” §

PALESTINIAN RAP TACKLES INJUSTICE

By: Joel Balsam

Hip-hop was alive and well in Montreal on Sept. 28th as Arabic rappers DAM and the Narcicyst rocked Café Campus as a part of the Artists Against Apartheid series.

DAM, the first-ever Palestinian hip-hop crew, came all the way from Lod, Israel (20km from Jerusalem) to share the story of their lives under Israeli occupation. The group's raw lyrics delivered mostly in Arabic discuss controversial issues such as terrorism, drugs, women's rights, and the freedom of the Palestinian people.

The name DAM means blood in both Arabic and Hebrew.

DAM is comprised of brothers Tamer and Suhell Nafar, along with third member Mahmoud Dreri. They came together in 1999 and have been a sensation in the Middle East ever since. Their 2001 hit song "Min Irhabi" ("Who's the Terrorist?") was released on the Internet and received over one million downloads in the first month. The song, which can be viewed on Youtube with English subtitles, offers ruthless lyrics like: "You're the terrorist!/You've taken everything I own/While I'm living in my homeland."

According to lead performer Tamer, the group ultimately wishes to portray a message of hope with their music. He compares this hope to "a flame in the darkness of a cave."

DAM has also experimented with rapping in Hebrew in an attempt to get through to the Israeli population. They say that Palestinians know what is going on because they experience it everyday, while Israelis may not.

Hip-hop historically has been used as a tool for the underprivileged to express a political message of social change. When hip-hop was born in the U.S during the 1970s and 80s, groups like the Universal Zulu Nation, founded by Afrika Bambaataa, discussed the issues surrounding the disenfranchised black minority in

America. Other early, or "old school" political hip-hop music includes Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five in their 1982 song "the Message," Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" in 1989, and 2pac's "Trapped" in 1991.

DAM discusses how this brand of hip-hop influenced their life in a documentary film highlighting the group called Slingshot Hiphop.

The group saw 2pac's music videos on TV with footage depicting the horrid conditions of the ghetto and couldn't help but notice the striking resemblance to their own neighbourhood.

DAM was refreshingly light-hearted during their show in Montreal despite such heavy messages; they even tried to make jokes in English. At one point, they had the crowd simultaneously laughing and dancing as they sang out the chorus in English to their song "I Fell in Love With a Jew."

The packed house at Café Campus was not your typical hip-hop crowd either. The event included an audience of diverse ages, languages and backgrounds. Scott Weinstein, 52, a member of Independent Jewish Voices Montreal, a Jewish group advocating for Palestinian human rights, said this of the event: "It was very fun, creative and moving. One of the better music shows I've been to, and I am not a hip-hop fan."

Iraqi Canadian rapper Yassin Alsalman a.k.a The Narcicyst opened the show with an upbeat performance that included strong political lyrics in English and Arabic concerning contentious issues like the 9/11 attacks, the invasion of Iraq, Islamophobia and the Arab-Israeli conflict. His new politically charged video for "P.H.A.T.W.A." was filmed at Concordia's EV building.

The goal of the event was to raise awareness for the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign against the state of Israel. Lengthy speeches from members of Tadamon! (meaning solidarity in Arabic)

who organized Artists Against Apartheid IX discussed ways in which people in Canada can participate in the boycott against Israel. Some ways any individual can get involved in the campaign are to boycott Chapters, Israeli produce and clothing made in Israel. Essentially, the BDS movement demands that any company or organization that profits from the occupation should be boycotted.

The BDS campaign made headlines recently as the Toronto International Film Festival was boycotted by more than 50 artists, writers, filmmakers and academics including Naomi Klein, Noam Chomsky, Viggo Mortensen and Danny Glover for having this year's artistic spotlight on Tel Aviv.

The international campaign, which began in 2005 demands an end to the occupation of all Arab lands, the dismantling of the internationally illegal separation wall, the recognizing of Palestinian human rights, and the right of return for all Palestinian refugees. §



Dam performing at Café Campus in Montréal.

FACELESS FREEDOM

By: Maya Hamovitch

Artists can be thought of as architects of change; they are creators who seek to make the world a better place by challenging, provoking and inspiring society at large. Case in point, the controversial artist Sun Mu, who escaped from North to South Korea and is now turning his training in propaganda painting into a symbol of free expression.

Trained by the North Korean Army in propaganda art, and later studying art in college, “Sun Mu” (whose name is a pseudonym and who refuses to be photographed for fear that his family may face reprisals) identifies his art as a “socialist realist” style of painting. Mu’s images are replete with political satire. His best known painting, entitled “Happy Children” depicts

a line of kindergarten children with uniform smiles so identical, it seems almost uncanny. At the bottom of the image, a slogan screams out to its viewers: “We are all happy children!” While many have voiced concern that this image is a tendentious symbol of communism, an alternate, more likely interpretation is that Sun Mu has subverted the familiar North Korean scene of smiling children to critique that very regime.

This “faceless artist”, as he is commonly referred to, is not afraid to comment on the politics that pervade this image. In a recent interview with a New York Times reporter, he dismissed accusatory claims that his art reflected pro-communist views, but revealed his own intention: “I’m not a communist, far from it...When people look at my paintings, I hope they can hear the children asking, “Do you really think we’re happy?”

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He described how he integrates his own oppressed past into his politically cynical images: “They teach you how to smile that regimented smile- there’s a certain way to shape your mouth... we children thought we were happy. We didn’t realize that our smile was fabricated and manufactured”.

While some have labeled his artwork crude, others recognize his skillful use of personal history and training to frame and deconstruct political messages. Kim Dong-il, a visual arts critic and lecturer at Sogang University in Seoul revealed to the New York Times: “His style is North Korean, but when he brought it to South Korea, it became something completely different. The children’s smile in his paintings becomes too idealized to be real. A smile is not always an expression of happiness and can often mean the opposite.” Sun Mu has successfully drawn attention to the likelihood that these smiles mask the helplessness experienced by North Koreans.

Sun Mu’s socialist-realist technique enables him to use the propagandist style he knows so well to create a parody of the regime from which he escaped. His critically satirical art pushes boundaries and lifts the veil on all that is considered taboo. In one of his paintings, a woman raising her middle finger is completely nude, apart from the North Korean flag slipping off her body (an especially provocative act, as nudity is strictly forbidden in the North). Sun Mu continuously dares to disregard and contest North Korean restrictions and ideology. His iconoclastic work goes so far as to contravene strong taboos against representing the sacred leaders of Korea; this artist not only represents Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung without permission to do so, he portrays them clad in symbols of Western capitalism, Nike and Adidas clothing.

While freedom of speech is considered to be a human right and a central pillar of journalism, freedom of expression for artists addressing political causes has not had the same degree of attention. Sun Mu can be thought of as a model and an inspiration for artists who wish to express messages of social justice and denounce oppression through creative modalities.



A selection of Sun Mu's works.

Like so many others who feel compelled to speak out against the injustices of the world, Sun Mu’s brilliant political commentary is driven from within; as he stated in March 2009 (in a NY Times interview), “I cannot help being political ... How can I ignore the reality of the North where my parents are still suffering? I would like to believe that art can change the world in whatever way it can.” This artist’s work has stirred the divided nation of which he is part and in so doing, he has laid claim to freedom of expression, freedom to represent injustice, and freedom from oppression for his people. §

We're sorry, but this site is currently down for censorship – we mean, “maintenance”

By: Veronica French

“This page cannot be displayed” is an all too familiar message 300 million Chinese internet-users see on a daily basis. In 2007, Reporters Without Borders ranked China in the 163rd spot out of 168 countries on their press freedom index. The Chinese government’s tight grip on media outlets and the transmission of information is a fact that has been a popular practice since the birth of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, allowing them to retain their monopoly on power. Information is a powerful tool, which explains the government’s perverse aversion to the flow of information and social communication. But the current age of internet, cell phones, and cable TV have the government shaking in their boots, making them ever more paranoid, and inspiring them to turn the censorship dial up a few notches.

The most powerful monitoring body in the government is the Communist Party’s Central Propaganda Department (CPD), in control of both the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) and the State Administration of radio, Film, and Television (SARFT). These institutions have enough power to ban materials and shut down outlets. The Chinese communist party’s censorship apparatus has banned over 19,000 websites out of the existing 204,000 according to a study conducted by researchers at Harvard Law School’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society. The researchers found that the Chinese government not only bans web destinations of democracy, Taiwan, and Tibet, subjects they deem as threatening, but also sites on health, education, entertainment, news, religion, and pornography. The government is also speedy to block social media websites, such as Facebook and Blogspot, and Fanfou,

the Chinese version of twitter. They do so claiming that it is the Chinese citizens’ responsibility to defend “the security, honor, and interests of the motherland”.

Not surprisingly, China has the world’s biggest prison for internet-dissidents, totaling 57 prisoners, five of them Tibetan. The government also has the authority to dismiss or demote editors or writers, to publish libels, and to close down any news outlets they deem unpatriotic. But besides imprisoning and harassing journalists for violating the rules, the government has begun using new forms of media control, aided by major international software and hardware companies. Amnesty International found that companies like “Cisco Systems, Microsoft, Nortel Networks, Websense and Sun Microsystems” are the main providers of censoring technology used to control the Internet in China.

In June of this year, the Chinese government went even further to control the media through the placement of a new internet filtering software called Green Dam into PCs belonging to Chinese civilians. However, this government initiative failed. One reason for this was that computer manufacturers did not have enough time to pre-install Green Dam into every Chinese computer on the market, delaying the government’s plans. As well, a stronger deterrent to their plans was the large-scale protests and public resistance across the nation that erupted in opposition to the program.

Unfortunately, Green Dam’s failure inspired authorities to introduce a new technology: Blue Dam. The government issued a statement, forcing all network providers to install Blue Dam on their servers by September 13th of this year. The new program filters graphics and content, and monitors and manages users’ internet behavior. This monitoring discloses individuals’ identities and as a result,

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eliminates their anonymity. This time, the government's argument is that the program will be used by company managers in order to monitor their employees' Internet behavior, preventing them from straying into non-work related websites.

But despite the insurmountable obstacles and threats Chinese individuals may face, they still manage to find a way to find the information they are prohibited from seeing. The blogosphere may be considered China's last space for freedom of expression, and journalists can use their blogs to satirize the government using humor. As of October 8th, a group of fifteen Chinese intellectuals, made up of scholars, writers, and lawyers, published the Internet Human Rights Declaration online. The declaration, consisting of ten points, emphasizes the fundamental value freedom of speech and exchange of opinions has to all people in order to satisfy their basic human rights. They argue that Internet users, or netizens, should be protected, encouraged, and free from intimidation, where their anonymity should be respected always. The Internet Human Rights Declaration encourages all Internet users and human

rights advocates around the world to support their effort by signing their petition online.

Still, if it's not government intimidation that stops Chinese citizens from resisting the government's media control, then it's the "habit of silence". After so many years of censorship, many Chinese netizens have lost the inspiration to counteract the government's efforts to keep the population in the dark. Now, many hope that the Blue Dam fails like its predecessor, and allows Chinese citizens greater freedom of expression. §



Internet café in Shanghai, China.

WHEN A PRIME MINISTER SPEAKS:

Reflections on how a "leader" incites hate in Canada

By: Pamela Fillion

Six weeks after the 40th general election of Parliament on October 14th, 2008, the minority Conservative government faced a non-confidence vote in the House of Commons. This political dispute was triggered largely by the Conservative government's fiscal update presented on November 27th, 2008. The update presented several provisions that none of the opposition parties, including the Liberals, would accept. One of these provisions was to cut off funding to the other parties in Parliament. The Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party, with some support from the Bloc Québécois, agreed to form a coalition government, because Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his minority government had lost the confidence of the

House of Commons. Soon after, the public became aware that Harper was preparing to consult with the Governor General of Canada, Michelle Jean, in an effort to stop Parliament and avoid the non-confidence vote that was being planned by the opposition. In December 2008, the Conservative government presented their economic plan for Canada in parliament, and attempted to take attention away from the no-confidence motion.

While embroiled in this tense political climate, Harper not only fueled the fire of this political crisis by proroguing government, but targeted Quebecers in an attempt to deflect the anger and discontent of the public onto a scapegoat. The tactics used by Harper in addressing the no-confidence motion are the object of this essay. These

tactics include his distortion of facts, usage of public ignorance of the way Canada's Parliament works, and incision of public anger against Quebec and manipulating the public into thinking that a coalition is "undemocratic" and that the other parties were not voted into Parliament.

A close reading of Harper's statement to Canadians reveals a disturbing attitude, which according to many reports, was largely toned down for the public. This is the first time in Canadian history that a Prime Minister has sought to suspend Parliament to avoid a non-confidence vote. According to Stephane Dion, Harper's actions are "an abuse of power that is unprecedented in Canadian history". According to constitutional convention, when a non-confidence occurs, the Governor General either orders a new election or appoints the opposition government. According to Barbara Yaffe of Canwest News Service, Harper's proroguing is "in an extraordinary bid for time to win public support- in many ways the ultimate arbiter of all political disputes".

According to Andy Blatchford of Canadian Press, "criticism of support by the Bloc Quebecois for the coalition between the federal Liberals and the NDP to unseat Harper's Conservative government have resulted in cries from opponents on Parliament Hill that federal Liberal chief Stephane Dion and NDP boss Jack Layton are consorting with separatists who want only to break up Canada. This has resulted in some Quebec bashing to some quarters and allegations that alliances with the Bloc are tantamount to treason." According to the Toronto Star, Harper treated the Bloc Quebecois as a scapegoat in his remarks, and now "risks stirring up anti-Canada resentments in Quebec and anti-Quebec feelings in the rest of the country. Then we might have a national unity crisis layered on top of the economic crisis."

As the political crisis grew in scale, the House of Commons and the leaders of the various parties each gave a statement to the Canadian public. According to the Toronto Star, Harper's speech was "breathhtakingly audacious, both in its twisting of the facts and its misinterpretation of our parliamentary traditions". This is very disconcerting. Furthermore, it seems that Harper ignored and is ignoring the fact that "Canada does not have a presidential system" and that "Canadians did not elect Stephen Harper as Prime

Minister on Oct. 14. They elected a Parliament, to which the government of the day must be responsible. Harper's Conservatives have more seats than any other party in that Parliament. But they do not have a majority.

Premier Jean Charest pointed out that the Bloc Quebecois was elected by 1.4 million Quebec voters in the Oct. 14 federal election and that a true democracy must recognize the political legitimacy of the Bloc's place in Parliament. Gilles Duceppe said in his statement to the Canadian public that the Bloc Quebecois is a party that exists to serve Quebecers in Parliament and not to "break up the country." Duceppe also stated that Harper and his government, once again, questioned the choice of Quebec voters to have a party that represents them and their culture in federal government.

Prime Minister Harper's tactics in avoiding a no-confidence vote and his attacks on Quebec are both disconcerting actions that demand careful scrutiny from the public and media. The violation of human rights is often the result of the way in which politicians target groups of people in the media in order to deflect criticism away from themselves. This is especially unfortunate because politicians are supposed to represent the people who may be criticized. It is truly disturbing when the Prime Minister of Canada acts as an incendiary to racial and cultural misunderstandings, during a time of political and economic crisis. It is even more disturbing when a party in Parliament uses their position to try and cut off the right of other parties to exist. Furthermore, it is disturbing when a Prime Minister uses the public to do their dirty work by twisting and misrepresenting "democracy" in Canada. These are the types of tactics that lead to the violation of human rights on a massive scale, especially when disseminated through the power of mass media. Herein are echoes of Walter Benjamin's warning that Fascism exists and "sees its salvation" not in giving the masses what is their due, but in giving the masses a chance to express themselves while preserving existing relations. Indeed, Benjamin was right in 1935 and his warning resonates to this day: "Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life[...]. All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war". Keeping this in mind, Harper should be highly criticised for his actions during the crisis of December 2008. §

Photo Essay

JHR IN GHANA

By: Mary MacLennan

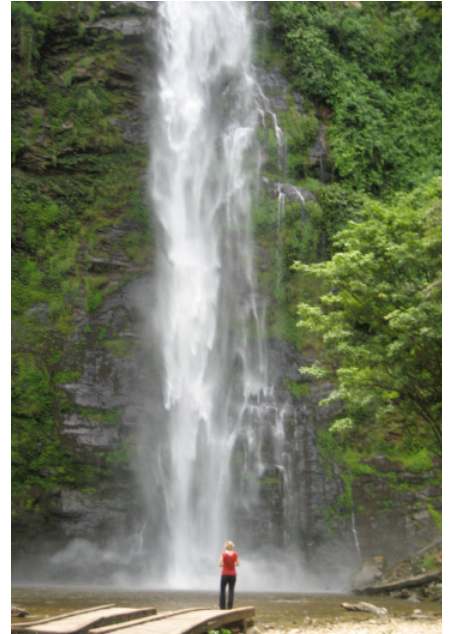
Through Journalists for Human Rights, this summer I interned in Ghana with Kapital Radio researching and writing stories for the Six O'clock News; as well as co-producing the station's health and human rights shows. Some of the issues I covered included child labour, counterfeit medicines and a doctor's strike. I had many memorable journalism experiences from speaking to vendors who lost their livelihoods in a massive market fire to interviewing to a founding member of a major political party on governmental scandal. I also was in the front row of a media scrum covering a speech by the First Lady and conducted a case study on access to quality medicines.

In addition to gaining a great deal of journalism experience, I also had the opportunity to travel around the country during a bit of vacation time. With David Kumagai, the other jhr intern, I went to the Kakum National Park and walked across bridges suspended above the rain forest and hung out with crocodiles. I also swam in the gorgeous Wli Waterfalls as well as took a 36-hour ferry across Lake Volta seeing stunning views and delivering weekly water supply to remote villages. I concluded my travels by going on a safari in Mole National Park where I was lucky enough to see elephants among other animals!

What are you up to next summer? Applications for the 2010 internships are due November 4th. Email jhrmcgill@gmail.com for a form or to get answers to any questions you might have. For more information check out the past interns' blogs at <http://jhrghanamedia.wordpress.com> (scroll down a bit to see my entries!)



Photo Essay



FREE SPEECH SUPPRESSION IN SRI LANKA

By: Nadila Ali

I will remember May 18th, 2009 for two specific and seemingly paradoxical reasons. One was a happy occasion, the nineteenth birthday of one of my dearest and oldest friends. The other, a more somber occurrence, was the confirmation of the death of Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, or the Tamil Tigers), the Tamil insurgency movement in Sri Lanka that has been fighting for Tamil sovereignty since 1976.

I know readers are probably wondering how my friend and Prabhakaran are in any way related to one another; she is neither Tamil, nor Sri Lankan, and to be honest, she probably does not even know who Prabhakaran is. But to me, the correlation was clear: this friend of mine is an adamant supporter, above all things, of toleration and free speech. With her birth came into existence a person who is capable of listening to the dissenting babble of others without getting angry. Comparatively,

Prabhakaran's death was considered to be a loss of a freedom fighter by some and a murderer by others.

Though I can neither contest nor confirm either view on the deceased Mr. Prabhakaran, I do know one thing about him: the LTTE leader, as well as the Sri Lankan government who fought against him, were and still are direct contradictions to my friend; Prabhakaran was regarded by many in the media as an *impediment* to toleration and free speech. Whatever his political motives may have been, his actions in Sri Lanka, along with those of the Sinhalese government, squashed any differences of opinion within the island country. My friend is, herself, a friend of free thinkers and journalists. Prabhakaran and Mahinda Rajapaksa, the current Sri Lankan president, are opponents of this very basic right to freedom of expression.

Agencies around the world that promote free speech and freedom of the media have published reports detailing the restrictions on the press in Sri Lanka. According to Reporters Without Borders, Sri Lanka is the fourth most dangerous country in the world for journalists after Iraq, Somalia, and Pakistan, and is ranked 165th out of 175 countries for press freedom. Sri Lanka's press freedom ranking has been a result of actions carried out by both the government and the LTTE since the outbreak of the civil war in 1983. In their drives for "liberty" both parties have instead succumbed to the need for power and silence those who dissent them with violence.

Threats, destruction of property and offices, violent attacks, kidnappings, and murder are some of the risks facing journalists who do not abide by the rules of these two groups. In the end, they cease to write freely in fear for their safety from the both the government, who



Sri Lankan troops carry a body identified as that of Tamil rebel leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran.

purportedly “protects” them, and the LTTE, who supposedly struggles for independence and “liberation.” Organizations such as Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders have published reports on the LTTE’s intimidation of journalists in Eastern Sri Lanka, forcing them to write pro-Prabhakaran pieces before the end of the Civil War. Fearful of aggression by both the government and the LTTE, many Sri Lankan journalists resort to self-censorship, taking perspectives and opinions that are forced upon them by their intimidators. In terms of government censorship, Amnesty International has reported “journalists writing about the war without getting approval from the Media Centre for National Security put themselves at risk.”

In May 2009, independent correspondents from around the world were also denied access by the government to war zones in the midst of military action in Sri Lanka. Amnesty International reports that exclusion of reporters from the country prevented the verification of civilian casualty figures and “meant that the international community could not effectively address the situation.” The report further elaborated that without accurate numbers of war-displaced civilians, agencies designed to assist the exodus of refugees did not have the facilities available to help those in need.

The media within Sri Lanka is divided along ethnic and linguistic lines, consolidating the divisions between the Sinhalese and Tamils. Media no longer becomes about factual expression but an outlet for both state and LTTE propaganda. If media producers and journalists could be integrated into working with one another, perhaps a different reality would be portrayed. However, firstly the government needs to set an example to the people and end this gross violation of rights to expression. It has won the Civil War. Prabhakaran is dead. It can now begin its incorporation of Tamils into Sri Lankan society by beginning the process of free media expression.

At the end of the day, Sri Lanka is only one of the many countries where free speech is stifled in such a violent and oppressive way. Albeit, the situation there can be considered worse than in many other states, but it is no particular exception in a world where tolerance is rejected for hatred, where plurality is replaced by divisiveness. I wonder what the Sri Lanka and the rest of the world would be like if my friend had some say in the matter. At least then journalists and individualists would not be persecuted for either facts or opinions. §



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THE LOST VOICES OF CHECHNYA

Despite alleged improvements from governments, freedom of speech remains severely limited in Russia

By: Aude Florin

You might remember seeing obituaries for Natalia Esterimova, the Chechen journalist who was murdered this past summer. Then again, you might not, as it seems to have attracted very little attention. While international attention has been somewhat deflected from problems in Chechnya, a series of murders of human right activists and journalist reveals how much remains to be done in Russia's Caucasian republics.

Chechnya is part of the Russian Caucasian Republics along the Republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia. Chechnya first fought a war to secede from the former Soviet Union in 1994 – 1996 and succeeded in installing a independent government. After a chaotic period marked by kidnappings, extreme poverty and religious strife, Russia launched another offensive on Chechnya in 1999, causing international uproar. Russia removed the bulk of its troops in April 2009, and the situation remains extremely unstable. The country is still shaken by ethnic and separatist tensions, and several people have been kidnapped or have 'disappeared' in the last years. Much of Chechnya's national identity is centred around Islam, and the country also suffers from severe religious tensions between moderate and more extreme groups. These tensions are often pointed to as one of the reasons that triggered the war.

Natalia Estemirova was killed in July of this year under unresolved circumstances. A Chechen journalist and member of Memorial, one of the foremost Human Rights activist groups in the region, she had reported throughout the war and against the regime imposed on Chechnya which she deemed authoritarian and corrupt. Local officials have denied any involvement with her

murder. Since the murder, Memorial has decreased its activities, but other groups continue to protest against the local government.

Generally, self censoring, fear of pressures and harassment, and acts of violence have prevented journalists from criticizing the government in these areas. A 2009 report issued by Reporters Without Borders entitled 'Russia, Russian Caucasus: The media Iron Curtain' reports that 'most of the local media are government mouthpieces or regarded as such'.

Anna Politkovskaya was another reporter whose criticisms of the Russian government and coverage of Chechnya played a crucial role in her unsolved death. Politkovskaya was a Russian reporter who became famous for her courageous work on Chechnya. She interviewed countless victims of the war, and covered torture and abuses of the successive regimes in the region. She was generally very critical of former Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime, but focused her reporting mainly on the North Caucasus region of Russia, and wrote many award winning books on the subject. Though the state of emergency in the North Caucasus region has just recently been removed, corruption is rampant, violent altercations are frequent and the government is currently being investigated for torture by Human Rights Watch. Due to her stance on these issues, she was shunned from public events by the Russian government and received several death threats throughout her career. Politkovskaya was shot and killed in 2006, and while the exact conditions of her murder are still being investigated, there is strong evidence that it was connected with high government officials.

According to the Chechen government, 22 journalists have been killed and 100 murdered, but journalists suggest

that numerous other cases are not pursued. Notably, Anna Politkovskaya's name is absent from the monument to slain journalists in the Chechen capital, Grozny.

Reporters Without Borders points to the weakness of the local media and their general lack of critical groundwork in Chechnya. The local media in Chechnya is funded mainly by the state and access to international information is not encouraged. Government leaders claim to accept and even encourage criticism, and their only demand is that the reports be 'objective'. However, Samshail Saralyev, also states in this report that the aim is to maintain national unity in order to avoid future war. According to this view, anything viewed as critical or inciting protests can be accused of stirring political turmoil and contestation can thus be silenced.

Interviewed by Reporters Without Borders, Lyoma Turpalov, the editor of one of Chechnya's rare privately owned newspapers, suggests that self-censorship prevents journalists from criticizing the government in local media. Interestingly, Moscow-based newspapers, such as Novaya Gazeta, the one Anna Politovskaya wrote for, offer the most vocal criticism of the local situation in Chechnya. While local press is almost nonexistent, Chechnya is considered privileged in its access to information because most federal newspapers are available for free, especially in Grozny. However these publications almost never address the problems at hand in the region.

The surrounding republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia suffer from similar restrictions on local media. In Ingushetia, the opposition website Ingushetia.org was shut down for being too critical of the government, and its owner was shot in the head while detained by the ministry of Interior Affairs. The website's editor now lives in exile for safety reasons, and the website is still not available in Ingushetia.

Human Rights Watch stresses the increase in torture cases in Chechnya and the government's resistance to international investigation attempts. It also stresses the recurrence of punitive expeditions and violent repression, mainly punishing the families of alleged

insurgents. Their report, 'What your children do will touch on you', was published in July 2009 and discusses the pressures and threats activists are exposed to if they are seen as troublemakers by the government.

“*Most of the local media are government mouthpieces or regarded as such.*”

Another example of restricted information is that in Chechnya, European Court of Human Rights bills are not posted in the stated-owned media, notably a number of them concerning Russia and Chechnya more specifically. Hence Chechens have to rely greatly on the internet to find alternatives sources of information, as information offered by the local media is highly restricted. NGOs, rather than the press, are the main voices of opposition in Chechnya, and are subjected to similar levels of ostracism and intimidation.

Suppressing freedom of speech seems to be more widespread around Russia but remains a particularly sensitive subject in the case of Chechnya and its neighbours. Though hostilities are officially over and the economic situation appears to be improving, basic human rights violations go unreported because local journalists fear reprisals from the government. The message of murdered journalists should not go unheard, and these issues deserve a more thorough coverage by international media. §



Natalia Estemirova, slain Chechen journalist.

WELCOME TO EASTERN EUROPE: For Class Conflict, Turn Left; For Hate Speech, Turn Right; For Free Speech... Keep Hoping.

By: Anne Cohen

When we evaluate the quality of democracy in a country, one of the key factors considered is the level of freedom of speech. Freedom of speech is defined as the freedom to speak freely without censorship or limitation and without fear of punishment. It is recognized as a human right in Article 19 of the "International Declaration of Human Rights". There have been debates over the past couple of decades about whether free speech should be limited so as to prevent hateful messages to be spread or not. This is a question to be considered carefully. If we limit free speech on one issue, it sets a precedent for other issues or discourses to be banned. On the other hand, hate speech is a dangerous thing, especially in countries where political institutions are fragile and democracy is fairly new. The most well known ideology based almost entirely on hate and racism is Nazism, whose ideological followers took power not only in Germany but also in certain countries of Eastern Europe during the early 1930s. With the fall of communism in 1989, Eastern European countries have faced a political dilemma as the void left by communism is increasingly filled with nationalist right wing parties. This has caused the issue of freedom of speech to come up again, especially concerning hateful messages coming from neo-Nazi factions in Eastern Europe.

The extreme political right has had its share of success in Eastern Europe over the last century. The end of the First World War brought much of the same disappointment for the Eastern European countries which had allied with Germany – Hungary and Bulgaria – as in Germany itself. Hungary lost an enormous part of its territory to Romania, and Bulgaria, which had entered the war late and on the losing side, was demilitarized

and forced to pay reparations. In the same way as it was in Germany, fascist ideology was appealing and alluring. In the years leading up to World War II, youth groups such as Romania's Iron Guard appear in various countries in Eastern Europe. These groups were not unlike the Hitler youth and were at the service of the increasingly fascist governments in countries like Romania, and Hungary. It is therefore not surprising that these countries joined World War II on the German side. After the Soviet Union liberated Eastern Europe and included the region in its sphere of influence, fascist tendencies were crushed forever. Or so they thought.

After the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, Eastern European countries were left to build a completely new system of government. In the vacuum of power left by exiled communist leaders, the extreme right began to resurface, under the guise of center right parties.

In Hungary for example, one of the most prominent leaders of the opposition to the communist movement and also an important playwright, Lazlo Csurka, became leader of Hungary's center right party after the fall of the communist government. In 1992, he shocked his party by expressing that his political opposition, Jews, Western financiers and the media were sabotaging the Government's work. He supported his argument by reciting past meddling by Western powers and Jews in Hungary's governmental affairs.

In Romania, there was a real scare for supporters of moderation in 2000 when Corneliu Vadim Tudor, leader of the Greater Romanian Party, almost won the presidential election against Ion Iliescu. Tudor had become a passionate nationalist after the fall of communism and presidential election against Ion Iliescu. Tudor had be-

come a passionate nationalist after the fall of communism and had denounced Iliescu's takeover because of his past as a communist official. The Greater Romanian Party was a far right party, which held seats in both of Romania's legislative chambers from 1990 to 2008. Tudor's platform included deporting people for non-Romanian activities and creating a "national construction site" for wayward youths. As he put it: "Gypsy criminality must be eradicated by education and jobs." Tudor had also been a vocal opponent of what he called "dirty Jews" and "Hungarian terrorists" and had in the past published lists of "traitors who should be liquidated" He has served as a Romanian senator since 1992.

Though the extreme right has less power and influence in Eastern Europe today than it did ten or twenty years ago, it is still present in the actions of neo-Nazi groups that still run rampant. In Serbia for example, Nacionalni stroj (National Alignment) is a neo-Nazi group which attracted a lot of attention in 2005 after they defaced a Jewish cemetery, two human rights NGOs and a Western leaning radio station. They were widely condemned by the government and democratic parties but no one was arrested. On the tenth anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, during which 8000 Bosnian boys and men were killed, a group called National Formation posted slogans celebrating the event. The group has also been accused of attacking Albanians, Hungarians, Croats and Roma people as well as spreading anti-Semitic propaganda. In 2005, charges were pressed against 18 of the leading members who now face up to 8 years in prison.

The question that comes out of these events is how far freedom of speech can go without infringing on human rights. It seems easy for some, especially some North Americans, to believe in limitless freedom of speech (even though hate groups exist and attempt to spread their message, it is unlikely that they will take over or gain substantial political power). However, in countries that have more recent, and therefore weaker political institutions and a more vulnerable population because of deprivation, economic instability and cynicism of government, extremely nationalist or racist scapegoat ideas are much more of a dangerous threat. On the

other hand, if governments who are consolidating their democracy start limiting free speech, it weakens civil society and therefore the quality of the democracy. The question becomes, how do we draw the line between the human right to freedom speech and the necessity of free speech for building a strong civil society and democracy, and the point where free speech goes too far? §



A member of the neo Nazi group, National Front, salutes a rally in Novi, Serbia.

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TRAIN-THE-TRAINER CONFERENCE 2009



JHR's third Train-the-Trainer conference at McGill was a huge success! Conference participants went to one of three student-led workshops on human rights issues and attended a guest lecture by Associate Professor Carrie Rentschler of the Communication Studies Department at McGill. Next, participants joined a discussion with the co-founder of Journalists for Human Rights, Ben Peterson, learned about the process of starting up an NGO as well as different human rights legislation in Canada. Finally, participants presented a workshop proposal to the rest of the group, learned about different aspects of human rights media, and did media analysis on existing media campaigns for human rights issues.

The next phase of the Train-the-Trainer program is for the conference participants to organize a smaller workshop at the high school level. If you are interested in organizing a Train-the-Trainer conference at the university or high school level, please email jhrmcgill@gmail.com.

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